

Katie Browe

“this is the sickness of becoming great,” Video Essay

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Does film shield us from deeply connective plays and performance? Or can it create a new layer of understanding for performance pieces that have been lauded for their visceral imagery and pain? *this is the sickness of becoming great* is a video adaptation of Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis*, exploring the possibilities of adding to the message and themes of a theatrical piece through sound and visual cinema. For a piece that is so rooted in Kane’s consciousness and personal experience, it also bridges the gap between Kane’s words and her life, using documentary footage and audio interviews to combine her words and imagination with a person who was more than just words and imagery.

Sarah Kane was a playwright influential in creating a new British theatre and giving power to other young British playwrights. Though her body of work is brief and spans only five years, it has provoked controversies and sparked thought from her first play, *Blasted* in 1995, to her last, *4.48 Psychosis* in 2000. By deviating from typical play structure, *4.48 Psychosis* allows for multiple interpretations and fluidity in performance decisions. Because the play touches on themes of separation from self and others and maintains a rhythmic poetry throughout, the barrier of screen and symbolic, poetic images in *this is the sickness of becoming great* supports and adds to Kane’s work and message.

Kane significantly influenced British theatre writing. She inspired other young playwrights in the Royal Court’s International Summer School. Her success throughout Europe led to new theatre writing instead of reimagining the classics. Alex Sierz termed the “series of theatrical techniques” Kane and other playwrights of the nineties used *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, a technique that parallels Absurdism and Theatre of Cruelty by presenting shocking, vulgar, and confrontational themes, characters, and plots to affect audiences. *this is the sickness of becoming great* uses the ideas from these three ideas to create film that is shocking and transformative. Distressing images and sound that build to overstimulation, removing passive viewing habits, following both Theatre of Cruelty and *In-Yer-Face Theatre*. Symbolism follows Kane’s ideas without being exacting, creating room for multiple interpretations, as in Absurdist thought. Other Absurdist ideas such as non-linear plot and unclear time and place, show the world of Kane’s mind and mental health in artistic fields as an incomprehensible place, isolating, and alienating.

Absurdist thought has been more “popular” than Theatre of Cruelty or *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, but none of these three ideas compare to the popularity of naturalistic plays and films. Because of this popularity among both art forms, transitions between the two are often naturalistic stories or techniques. This piece deviates from the tendencies of the theatre and film industries, opening more possibilities in storytelling techniques and connections.

Kane wrote a film, *Skin*, a 10-minute screenplay that premiered on Channel 4 showing that there is crossover in artists, ideas, and techniques between the film and theatre worlds. *this is the sickness of becoming great* seeks to continue to crossover the divide between the two art forms

as well as add to a theatrical piece through connections with the everyday and real life and focus on isolation through the barrier of a screen.

Exhibition requirements: Projector, screen, and speakers.

References

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- Sierz, A. (Sep., 2005) Beyond Timidity? The State of British New Writing. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp.55-61. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4140087>